



CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

Pres: Mr G. Sitch
Sec: Mr S. Bruton
Treas: Mr L. Bransgrove
Newsletter: Mr G. Broadway

APRIL 1980

45

ORCHIDS OF THE CASTLEMAINE DISTRICT Number 27 of a series

by Rita Mills

PRASOPHYLLUM DESPECTANS

(Sharp Midge Orchid)

Flowering time : In this district appears to be
May - September.



These minute orchids are found, if you have sharp enough eyes, around the district generally. They are so easy to miss that it is hard to say how widespread they actually are.

The plant is only 10 - 20 cm high, the greenish stem carrying from one to many flowers, which are variable in colour, yellow-green to purplish and brownish, usually only 2-4 mm in length and reflexed downwards.

The fruiting plant turns brownish-red.

There is no leaf, but there is a sheathing bract before the flower spike.

Club meetings are held on the second Friday of the month at the Castlemaine Education Centre in Mostyn Street, at 8 p.m. Visitors are welcome.

Excursions usually leave from outside the Education Centre unless otherwise arranged.

At the recent opening of the Harcourt Forest Industries sawmill, the managing director, Mr Segan claimed that the *Pinus radiata* grown in this area was superior to that grown in other parts of the state where the rainfall was heavier and the growth faster. Recent research by the CSIRO in Canberra supports this view.

In the Canberra experiment rooted cuttings were grown in sealed drums for up to 7 months without added water. Although transpiration dropped to 1% and some of the plants looked distinctly poorly, after watering, on most of the plants shoot growth was observed within one day of watering.

In resistance to drought, *Pinus* rivals *Eucalyptus*, as shown by the greater resistance to the drought of 1965 in the ACT., when comparison was made between a pine plantation and a neighbouring *Eucalypt* forest. In their natural habitat, California, rainfall is only 400mm but fogs are frequent suggesting that the trees are able to absorb moisture through their leaves. During a drought a tree can make up in one misty day for the water lost during 10 dry days.

from 'Ecos' Feb '80

THREAT TO KOALA POPULATION

As Koalas from Phillip Island are used for stocking Mainland reserves such as that on Mt Alexander, it is of some concern to learn that Monash researchers have found Koalas on Phillip Island to be suffering from a condition which lowers fertility.

The Monash scientists discovered a high incidence of ovarian disease in the Koalas which leads to female sterility. Assisted by a research grant from the Shell company, they caught a number of female Koalas, and after obtaining data on weight and condition, and tagging the ears, the animals were taken to Wonthaggi where they were anaesthetized, their abdomens inflated with air, and X-rayed. In the X-ray picture, ovarian cysts showed up as dense patches. The Koalas were then returned to their trees, having been absent for less than 12 hours.

The cysts form when an ovary does not burst as it should to release the ovum, but instead the ovum is retained in the follicle forming a cyst which leads to hormone imbalance, which further compounds the trouble. In sheep and cattle, this condition has been shown to be caused by chemicals present in certain pasture grasses. It is possible that certain *Eucalyptus* leaves may contain similar chemicals. It would in that case be important to discover whether the trees in the Mt Alexander park contain such chemicals which could if present, hinder the establishment of a viable Koala colony.

from Monash Review Mar.80

Both of the authors are well known to Castlemaine Field Naturalist Club members, for they were guests at one of the 1979 meetings, when they spoke to the club about grasses and allied plants.

Their book gives coloured photographs of over 50 species of fungi. For each species illustrated there is a description of the fungus, together with a description of the spores, its taste, whether poisonous or not, and additional comment. Included is an indication of where and when to look for the fungus.



The price is about \$13, which is, by today's standards quite reasonable. Recommended to those who wish to identify a fungus found on a ramble through the bush, and for those who wish to try their hand at living off the bush.

E.P.

OBSERVATIONS FOR APRIL

1. If it should happen to rain, which at present seems unlikely, which fungi appear first ? (see book review)
2. Are young male blue wrens starting to change colour yet ?
3. Are there any White-fronted Chats to be seen, or have they all migrated ?
4. Do all swallows migrate, or do some remain ?
Have any migrating flocks been seen ?
5. Have any robins been seen yet ? If not, watch for the first one ?
Which sort of Robin is it ?
6. Have any freshly cast pupal skins of Wattle or Goat moths been found ? Before rain ? After rain ?
7. Any cockroaches carrying egg cases ?
8. Any full pupal cases of cup-moths on the bark or twigs of trees ?
9. Any other types of pupal case, in which insects may be spending the Winter ?
10. Has anyone seen a Rhinoceros beetle ? If so, where ?
11. What sort of trees are Frog-hoppers found on ?
12. Continue observations of the Planets. In which direction are Mars and Jupiter moving relative to the stars around them ?
In which way are they moving relative to each other ?

NEW NATIONAL PARKS MAP

The Division of National Mapping, NATMAP, has produced a 6 colour, 1: 5,000,000 map showing over 500 National Parks and other conservation reserves. At present it is available only in an unfolded form measuring 925 x 840 mm. It will later be available in a folded version.

It is available for \$2.10 from NATMAP sales offices.

MEETINGS

Fri Apr 11 Bee-keeping and
Native Flora
Speaker : Mr Ray Campbell of
Bendigo

Fri May 9 The Alps

Speaker : Mr E. Perkins
(The guest speaker who was to
address the club is unable to
come on this date, so Mr
Perkins' talk has been brought
forward. We look forward to
hearing Mr Burt at a Later date)

Wanted : Volunteers to give
5 minute talks (no longer) at
club meetings.
Mr L Bransgrove will give the
short talk at the April meeting.

Notes from the Committee

In response to our query re
the clearing of Campbell's Ck
the Council has informed us that
it intends to level and grass the
area which has been cleared, to
erect an adventure playground near
the Winter's Flat Primary School,
and possibly to construct a weir
which would make possible activit-
ies such as fishing, canoing, sail-
ing, etc.

Club members are to arrange a walk-
ing tour of inspektion.

Our club has been asked to host
the V.F.N.C.A. campout in 1981.
This takes place over the long
weekend in March.

Kingston Tours inform us that
they are running a camping coach
safari to Central Aust. in July
esp. for Field Nats. Max 34 pass.
15 days for \$ 280. 5% of proceeds
to the Beaglehole fund.

Approved by the W.V.F.N.C.A.

EXCURSIONS

Sat Apr. 12 Black Hill
(Just North of Kyneton)
Leave Ed. Centre at 1.30 p.m.
Leaders : Alex Smart and Wendy Hill
President and Secretary of the
Friends of Black Hill.

Fri to Sunday Apr 11 - 13
W.V.F.N.C.A. Campout at Port
Campbell

At this campout, Cliff Beaglehole's
book on the vascular plants of the
Corangamite - Otway region will be
launched.

Further details from Secretary.

Sat. May 10

To the Grant ranch at Barker's Ck.
Bring binoculars and see how many
birds you can spot.

June excursion

In search of fungi. Bring your
magnifying glass.

July excursion

Possibly to Sailors Falls area.

August excursion

Mopoke Gully with Ray Bradfield.
Bring your prospecting gear perhaps?
More details of these later outings
in later issues.

SUPPLEMENTARY BIRD LIST FOR
BARKER'S CREEK

from Wyn Palmer

Orange - winged Sitella
Tasmanian Silvereye
Olive - backed Oriole
Whistling Kite
Musk Lorikeet
Hooded Robin
Brown - headed Honeyeater
Red-rumped Parrot
Weebill (Brown form)